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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 3RD BATTALION, 395TH INFANTRY
(99TH INFANTRY DIVISION) PRIOR TO AND DURING THE GERMAN
COUNTER-OFFENSIVE, 10 NOVEMBER - 24 DECEMBER 1944
(ARDENNES CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander
and Battalion Operations Officer)

Type of operation described: BATTALION IN DEFENSE

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INTRODUCTION

Many volumes, both factual and fictional, have been written and will continue to be written about the brilliant exploits of the American Armies during the battles of World War II. This is as it should be for no army mentioned in military annals has been able to match the superb efforts of this American fighting machine.

It has been quite natural to look back on the campaign fought by the American forces during World War II and visualize vast armies crushing the Axis foe. However, if a thorough analysis were made of any campaign, results would indicate that battles are won through the actions and efforts of the smaller units that comprise an army and to these small units must go the credit.

With the above thought in mind, this monograph will describe the operations of the 3rd Battalion, 395th Infantry, 99th Division, at Hofen, Germany, just prior to and during the German counter-offensive, 10th of November to 24th of December 1944.

THE GENERAL SITUATION

Western Front

What event, or series of events, led to the great German counter-offensive?

The answer is apparent, once due consideration is given the actions that preceded this startling counter-blow.

On the 25th of July 1944, after vicious fighting on the beaches of Normandy, the breakout at St. Lo was accomplished with results far exceeding Allied hopes. American tanks and Infantry plunged through France and Belgium with such undreamed of rapidity that operational time schedules were weeks behind and by September some units of the American First Army

had breeched the German frontier and were probing into the deep, dark Ardennes Forest. (1) (See Map A)

This sweeping assault paid dividends in time, space, and enemy personnel and material losses. However, on the debit side of the ledger were items that could not be overlooked. Allied supply lines were stretched far beyond efficient functioning; stocks of supplies of all types had dwindled to a dangerous low; continuous action had fatigued and depleted the fighting units; and no precise attack plan involving a sustained drive into Germany proper had been developed to fit existing conditions. The Allied drive slowly ground to a halt before the German Westwall defenses. (2)

Nevertheless, the Allied world was enthralled by the unusual success of their armies and talk of immediate German surrender was rampant.

September was a period of decision for General Eisenhower. Both General Bradley and General Montgomery made strong pleas to continue the offensive action without let-up. The only alternative was to commit all forces on a general line and await supplies and reinforcements before resumption of the offensive. (3)

General Eisenhower chose the latter plan, but modified to the extent that, although a general defensive line stretching from the North Sea to the Swiss border would be manned, continuous attacks would be conducted to further breach the German Westwall defenses. (4) (See Map A)

This decision was based on several sound deductions; the Germans were now fighting to keep the invader from penetrating their own homeland; the Westwall defenses had yet to be reduced; and finally, the supply and replacement problem facing the Allies had not been materially solved. (5)

The soundness of General Eisenhower's plan was later to be illustrated by the terrible losses inflicted on the Allied forces that attempted the ill-fated Metz, Huertgen, and Arnheim attacks. (6)

(1) A-3, p. 49,74; (2) A-3, p. 56-57; A-1, p. 37,38; (3) A-3, p. 49,61
(4,5) A-1, p.42; A-3, p. 62-63; (6) A-3, p. 63

During the latter days of September, 1944, Allied Supreme Headquarters was busy preparing plans for the resumption of the attack on Germany along the First, Third, Seventh, Ninth, and British-Canadian Army Sectors. Machinery was put in motion that would permit the Western Powers to again assume the offensive with the two-fold purpose of crushing the German Forces West of the Rhine, and then pushing into the cradle of German industry - the Ruhr. (7) (See Map A)

To carry out such a grandiose plan would require millions of supply tons and the massing of huge forces.

During the first weeks of October the supply situation was much better but the manpower situation was far below the desired level. The principle "Economy of Force" went into play and the seeds that produced the German counter-offensive were unknowingly planted. (8)

General Eisenhower and his staff scrutinized the entire line held by the Allied forces to find a sector that would permit a heavy withdrawal of troops from its defenses and still be able to hold with a reasonable degree of success.

The Ardennes, manned by units of the First Army, was the sector finally designated and the seeds of the German counter-offensive had now taken root.

General Eisenhower knew that he was taking a "calculated risk", but the reasoning behind the decision was quite sound and can be summed up as follows: the Ardennes Forest comprised a natural defensive barrier along which weak forces could be employed without likelihood of attack; the Germans were known to be using this area to rest and refit their troops; a paucity of good roads; and finally, a lack of offensive objectives for the Allied armies. (9)

Allied Supreme Headquarters had no way of knowing that another decision was being made in Berlin. During October 1944, the German High Command

(7) A-3, p. 67; A-1, p. 42; (8) A-1, p. 42; A-2, p.8; (9) A-2, p. 62; A-3, p. 75-76; A-1, p. 44

designated the Ardennes area as the locale for the German counter-offensive. (10)

Immediate action was taken on General Eisenhower's decision. During the latter part of October and early November, certain troop units within the Ardennes Sector of the First Army began moving North to the British and Ninth Army sectors and South to the Third Army sector. Units remaining were assigned wider frontages and greater areas of responsibility. With no influx of troop strength, commanders could only thin their lines and pray that the G-2 reports were sound. (11) (See Map A)

Thus on the 1st of November 1944, the 99th Infantry Division, composed of the 393rd, 394th, and 395th Infantry Regiments came under operational control of V Corps, First United States Army, and was assigned the mission of defending the southern portion of the V Corps sector now occupied by elements of the Fifth Armored Division and the Ninth Infantry Division.

By mid-November, the relief was completed and the 99th Infantry Division was firmly emplaced on a front that stretched from Monschau, Germany on the North to Losheimergraben, Belgium on the South - a distance of twenty-two miles. (12) (See Map A)

With such a frontage to defend, it was necessary for the Division Commander to place all his regiments on line, with the 395th Regiment on the North, the 393rd Regiment in the center, and the 394th Regiment on the South. Each regiment had approximately seven miles of frontage to defend. (13)

The 99th Infantry Division was definitely within the "calculated risk" area.

THE BATTALION SITUATION

On the 8th of November, 1944, the 3rd Battalion, 395th Infantry Regiment, 99th Infantry Division was bivouaced in the vicinity of Aubel,

(10) A-3, p. 11; (11) A-3, p. 67; A-1, p. 42; (12) A-5, p. 304,306,307;
(13) Personal Knowledge

Belgium. At this time, orders were received from Regimental Headquarters containing instructions for the 3rd Battalion to move to the vicinity of Kalterherberg, Germany and be prepared to relieve units of Combat Command "B", 15th Armored Infantry, 5th Armored Division, now on line in and around Hofen, Germany. (See Map C)

The Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. McClernand Butler, alerted the Battalion for movement and immediately departed on reconnaissance of the forward assembly area and the front line sector, taking with him the Battalion communications officer and the entire Battalion staff less the executive officer.

Lt. Col. Butler and the other members of the reconnaissance group returned from their reconnaissance at 1600, 8th of November 1944, and the Battalion moved to a forward assembly area one mile East of Kalterherberg. (14) (See Map C)

The Battalion completed its movement to the new assembly area at 2200, 8th of November 1944.

Without delay, plans were made for a complete reconnaissance of the battle position to include all officers and key NCO's. The Battalion Commander stated that it would be necessary for all key personnel to make a complete reconnaissance of the Battalion position because of the unusual terrain to be occupied, the extreme 6,000 yards frontage assigned, and the fact that a portion of the relief was to be executed during the hours of daylight. *See map. 4400 on AS.*

Officers and non-commissioned officers who made the subsequent reconnaissance were quick to realize that the Battalion Commander was quite correct in his statement, especially the part concerning the frontage and the terrain.

Let us take a quick look at the position.

As one approached the battle line from the West a high hill dominated the entire approach. This hill reached upward to an altitude of approximately (14) A-4; Personal Knowledge

1,600 feet. Its slopes, heavily covered with trees, appeared from a distance to be beyond ascent, but one road, of a very secondary type, permitted vehicular movement to the crest of the hill. Here we find the town of Hofen, Germany.

Hofen consisted of about one hundred houses perched on the razor back that formed the crest of the hill mass. It was a long, narrow town that just managed to keep itself clear of the surrounding forests.

Just three to four hundred yards forward of the South-West edge of town were located the front line positions. To the North was the town of Monschau, but it was practically invisible because it nestled in the deep Roer River gorge. Approximately 2,000 yards to the front was the town of Rohren, Germany, which was in the possession of the Germans.

The entire hill mass was practically surrounded by deep gorges which had been cut by the headwaters of the Roer River and the Roer River itself. (See Map C) *a Rur*

Truly, the above description does not suggest an advantageous defensive position, but a quick glance to the West from the town of Hofen revealed reasons enough why this hill would necessarily have to be defended - one could observe portions of the Monschau-Eupen Road, the town of Kalterherberg, and to the limit of visibility along the Elsenborn-Kalterherberg ridge.

All were vital military features of the American defense plan.

By 2400 hours, 9th of November 1944, all plans for the relief had been completed and every measure to preserve secrecy and minimize confusion had been considered by the two commands concerned. Liaison was established between the two units down to and including companies, guides provided at squad level, authority for the exchange of certain items of

(15) Personal Knowledge

equipment on position, and provision for the use of vehicles by the reliever and the relieved. (15)

At 0530, 10th of November 1944, the relief began. The Battalion Commander's plan stipulated no attempt would be made to change the 15th Armored Infantry disposition prior to or during the relief and that the relief would be made on a company basis with a time interval of two hours per company.

"I" Company was first to move and by 0730 had occupied the left portion of the Battalion sector. "K" Company then moved into the center and was followed by "L" Company on the right. (16) (See Map C)

The 81mm mortars occupied the Battery positions established by the mortar elements of the 15th Armored Infantry and were ready to fire almost instantly as all fire data computed by the Armored Infantry mortars was released to the mortar platoon of the 3rd Battalion. In addition, base plates were exchanged which proved to be a great advantage during initial registration. (See Map C) ?

The heavy machine guns were attached as follows: one platoon to "K" Company, one section to "L" Company and one section to "I" Company. These attachments were made prior to the actual relief and the machine gun elements moved in with the rifle companies.

By 1700 hours, 10th of November 1944, all elements of the Battalion had closed, were set for action, and the responsibility for the defense of the assigned sector passed to the 3rd Battalion, 395th Infantry at 1800 hours. (17) (See Map C)

From the very beginning it was obvious that numerous changes would have to be made in the Battalion defensive dispositions. A complete survey revealed that the 6,000 yards front was manned by a thin line of riflemen and automatic weapons. Communications were entirely inadequate, (15,16) Personal Knowledge

the 81mm mortars could not adequately cover the front without shifting their weapons, and there was absolutely no reserve to give depths to the position. (18)

On the 14th of November 1944, the Battalion Commander held a staff and company commanders' meeting at the Battalion C.P. at which time he outlined the priority of work at hand. He carefully explained the difficulty of defending a 6,000 yard front with a Battalion of Infantry, and insisted that each staff officer and commander give his utmost to strengthen the Battalion position. He also pointed out that the 99th Division was manning a front over 20 miles wide and since the 3rd Battalion was the extreme left Battalion of the Division, little or no help could be expected in case of an attack. (19)

These words could later be considered a prophecy.

From the 14th of November to the 15th of December 1944, every effort was made to strengthen and consolidate the Battalion defensive position. No longer could we find thin lines of riflemen - strong points, consisting of a light or heavy machine gun protected by riflemen, now covered the front and all approaches thereto. The 81mm mortar platoon had been reinforced and now consisted of 10 mortars, all sufficiently manned and able to cover any point on the front. Anti-tank and anti-personnel mines were used profusely to cover all routes of Infantry or Armor approach into the position. Protective and tactical wire was placed before the defensive position to give added strength. (20) (See Map C)

To give some punch and flexibility to the defense, one rifle platoon of "L" Company was placed in reserve within the town of Hofen. (21) (See Map C)

Especial emphasis was placed on communication and communication facilities. From the very beginning, it was evident that communication facilities authorized by the Tables of Equipment for an Infantry Battalion was (18) A-4; Personal Knowledge; (19,20,21) Personal Knowledge

hardly sufficient to tie-in a Battalion defensive position stretched over a 6,000 yard front. By borrowing, scrounging and improvising, a communication set-up involving fifty-two telephones of various types were slowly placed in operation. These phones were eventually installed in every strong point and observation post and the Battalion Commander was thus able to keep his fingers on the pulse of every situation on the wide front.

In addition to the above, extra SCR 536 and SCR 300 radios were allotted to all companies to furnish a reserve in case communication was lost.

Liaison, with the 38th Squadron, 102 Cavalry Group on the left and the 2nd Battalion, 395th Infantry on the right, was constant. This liaison was accomplished through visits by commanders and staff members of the units concerned and, in addition, wire lines were laid to further strengthen and speed the mutual exchange of information.

Also, during this period, the 3rd Battalion received reinforcements that really added to the strength of the defensive position. Company "A", 612 TD Battalion (3" towed) was attached to the Battalion and the 196 FA Battalion, First Army, was placed in direct support. (22) (See Map C)

Both units were neatly fitted into the defensive plan and the Battalion was beginning to feel its power.

Patrolling was the order of the day for both our forces and the enemy. Reconnaissance patrols of the 3rd Battalion ranged far and wide. Rohren and the heavily forested area in front of "K" and "L" Companies were constantly probed with very little opposition and with resultant reports that indicated the Germans were manning their front very lightly. (23) (See Map C)

(22,23) A-4; Personal Knowledge

Initially, the German patrols managed to penetrate our defenses and get into Hofen itself, but as the Battalion defensive structure became more fixed and consolidated, the activities of the German patrols were curtailed to a bare minimum.

It is interesting to note that the Germans lost sixteen men killed, wounded or captured while attempting to patrol our positions during the month of November 1944. This can be attributed to the fact that every conceivable point of entrance into the defensive position was mined and booby trapped and the Battalion Commander insisted that each sentinel, except those in automatic weapons emplacements, engage every enemy patrol, including those active during the hours of darkness.

The results of this program were encouraging and the audacity and effectiveness of the German patrols diminished until they were practically inactive or useless. The Germans were never able to determine the defensive pattern of the 3rd Battalion. (24)

By the 15th of December 1944, all possible measures had been taken to make the Battalion defenses as impregnable as possible. To many men and officers, the reasons for developing the position to such an extent were never clarified until the pre-dawn hours of December 16th, 1944. However, it is to the credit of all, and especially to the dynamic Battalion Commander, that regardless of the "quiet sector" thought, co-operation was practically perfect and each had a secure feeling that the Battalion would never be caught napping and subsequently defeated.

Let us turn our attention from the 3rd Battalion defensive sector and peer into the German orbit of military thought and action during the period of October 8th to December 15th, 1944.

(24) Personal Knowledge

THE GERMAN PLAN

Even during the height of the Allied push across France and Belgium the leader of Germany, Adolph Hitler, had been scheming with his Generals, especially Field Marshal Keitel and General Jodl, on ways and means of stealing the offensive from the Allied powers. (25)

Events in favor of a grand offensive against the allied invaders did not become apparent until September, 1944. At this time the Russian Front had been more or less stabilized by counter-attacking German forces; the Germans in Italy were holding firmly against allied attacks, and, on the Western Front, the British, Canadian, American, and French forces had eased to a halt before the German Westwall and had deployed along a 600 mile front. (26)

These facts, coupled with the huge manpower resources that had been able to escape the eastward drive of the Allied powers, tended to set the stage for future German operations. (27)

Immediately, the German High Command went into action on a plan that was to develop into a grand counter-assault. (28)

No attempt will be made within the scope of this monograph to go into profound detail concerning the inner workings of the German plan and the conduct of the operation. Suffice to state, German war industry, manpower, and propaganda were geared to new heights and every effort was made to make the counter-attack against the Allies a complete success. (29)

The Western Front was chosen over all others as the counter-assault target because Hitler and his cohorts realized that only on this front could decisive results and strategic objectives be obtained. The German High Command was also aware of the manpower and supply difficulties being endured by the Allied forces on the Western Front and quickly recognized a weakness. (30)

(25) A-3, p. 3,10,11; (26) A-3, p. 4,5; (27,28) A-3, p. 11;
(29,30) A-3, p. 6,7,8,10,12

The above factors influenced the German leaders to a great extent but the main influencing factor was that a successful counter-attack would necessarily bring to a halt any plans the Western Allies had made relative to a grand winter offensive against the German frontier. Germany needed time.

The last great question on the agenda of the German High Command was relative to the exact location through which the German thrust was to take place. (31)

The answer was supplied to Hitler by General Jodl who pointed to the Ardennes sector held by the American armies and explained to the German leader that only four American divisions were committed on an 80 mile front reaching from Monschau on the North to Echternach on the South. (32) (See Map A)

Hitler, remembering his success through this very same sector in 1940, was elated, and gave immediate orders to prepare the plan to strike through the Ardennes. (33)

The German plan in brief was to attack through the American sector of the Ardennes with the 5th, 6th, and 7th Panzer armies, block the shoulder of the penetration with Infantry and turn his Panzer armies loose to initially seize crossings of the Meuse River and then to speed on to Brussels and Antwerp. (34) (See Map B)

If the plan worked successfully the Germans could split the Allied forces on the Western Front and trap twenty to thirty divisions. Hitler's commanders also realized that such a sweeping counter-attack would not only set back Allied plans for a grand offensive against Germany but, if all worked well, the Western front might even collapse and the Germans would again be on the English Channel. (35)

Thus operation Wacht Am Rhein was born and on the 8th of October 1944, first orders initiating the operation were issued. (36)

(31,32,33) A-3, p. 10,11; (34,35,36) A-3, p. 12,13,14,29,30,32,33,34

The world now knows that at 0500, 16th of December 1944, the German counter-offensive smashed into the American position in the Ardennes with devastating results. However, within two weeks this operation was to bear bitter fruit for Hitler and the German Nation.

THE DEFENSE OF HOFEN, GERMANY

On the 15th of December 1944, the 3rd Battalion, 395th Infantry buttoned-up for the night in the usual manner. Nothing outstanding happened during the early hours of darkness, but at approximately 2300 hours, outposts and front line positions along the entire Battalion sector began a continuous stream of reports, concerning various unusual noises in the vicinity of Rohren and the woods surrounding the town.

Artillery and mortar concentration were poured into the reported areas until 0300, 16th of December 1944, at which time reports indicated that nothing unusual was taking place. (37)

At 0525, a tremendous barrage of heavy artillery, mortar, and rocket fire fell along the entire Battalion position with the heaviest concentration falling on the "I" and "K" Company areas and in and around the Battalion Command Post, located in the center of town. The barrage was continuous until 0545 at which time it abruptly ceased. (38) (See Map C)

The barrage accomplished an enormous amount of damage within the town of Hofen - fires raged everywhere and the streets were choked with the debris of smashed buildings and fallen telephone poles. The Battalion Command Post was hit again and again and all sentries on duty were either killed or wounded. All wire lines to subordinate, adjacent, and Higher Headquarters were severed. (39)

For a moment it seemed as though the entire Battalion was stunned and inert but this condition was quickly remedied. Radio communication was established, wire crews dispatched, and necessary reports to Regimental Headquarters were accomplished. The entire Battalion was alert. (40)

(37) A-4; Personal Knowledge; (38,39,40) A-4; Personal Knowledge

At 0550, the entire front was aglow with artificial moonlight produced by Germans playing powerful searchlights against the low-hanging clouds. "I" and "K" Company Commanders reported the light as being very favorable to their front lines as visibility was increased to about 200 yards. These reports turned out to be extremely important as the Artillery Forward Observers had computed the general location of the searchlights and had requested permission to fire. The Battalion Commander, in view of the desires of the front line commanders, refused their request. (41)

At 0600, the Germans came. (See Map C)

Out of the haze, they appeared before the Battalion position. They seemed to be in swarms moving forward in their characteristic slow walk. Their mass was centered along the boundary between "I" and "K" Company and along the left flank of "I" Company. "L" Company reported only patrol activity to their front. (42)

The artificial moonlight outlined the approaching Germans perfectly against the backdrop of snow, and every weapon the Battalion possessed opened fire on the attackers. This fire seemed to surprise the Germans and practically swept them from in front of the Battalion position. Not a single weapon had fired until the German forces were within 200 yards of the Battalion Main Line of Resistance. The automatic weapons had a field day and, as the German attackers deployed to engage their fire and attempt to knock them out, the Battalion strong point system of defense proved its effectiveness - riflemen dug in on the flanks and rear of each automatic weapon, made it practically impossible to approach the position from any angle and the Germans suffered heavy casualties. (43)

Until 0615, the 81mm mortars fired both the artillery and mortar concentrations as communication between the Artillery Liaison Officer and the 196 Field Artillery guns were out. However, since the attack was (41,42,43) A-4; Personal Knowledge

generally centralized, it was possible to use 10 mortars per concentration and the effect was devastating. At 0650, the artillery was again in communication and began firing missions.

The German losses were terrific and at 0655, they began to withdraw. Some heavy fighting continued around several strong points in the "K" Company area but that was soon cleared and what remained of the enemy retreated to the confines of the heavy woods in front of the Battalion.

(44)

The entire Battalion was elated over the action because of the very visible success of the defense. Before the positions, in the shell marked snow, lay the bodies of over 100 enemy dead and 41 prisoners of war who had fought their last battle.

The elation was short-lived, however, because at 1235, the enemy again launched an attack of company size along the "K" Company front. This company was dug in along a sunken road and it appeared that the Germans wanted the road to use as a means of approach into both "I" and "L" Company from their flanks. This attack was stopped cold by small arms fire and tremendous concentration fired by the artillery and mortars. More German dead dotted the snow covered approaches into the Battalion.

(45) (See Map C)

This was the last attack that developed on the 16th of December, but rest for the fatigued Battalion was simply out of the question. Heavy stocks of food and ammunition were dumped on position, position improved, dead removed, and streets cleared of debris to permit vehicle traffic to roll. By nightfall, the Battalion was again set to go. (46)

December 17th, 1944 was rather quiet except that German planes strafed and bombed the town of Hofen again and again. Material damage was heavy, but only one casualty was reported. (47)

(44) Personal Knowledge; (45,46,47) A-4; Personal Knowledge

With communications so bad, no one in Battalion knew until the 17th of December that German attacks were hitting along the entire Ardennes front. A radio message attaching the 3rd Battalion to the 47th Infantry Regiment, 9th Infantry Division was received at 1200 and it was becoming more evident that the quiet front was coming to life. (48)

The 38th Squadron, 102 Cavalry Group on the 3rd Battalion left had been pushed practically out of the town of Monschau on the 16th of December and only managed to restore their lines after fierce fighting. This was a source of concern to the Battalion Commander because the loss of Monschau would compromise the positions at Hofen. (49) (See Map C)

The 17th ended quietly.

There was no sleep for the Battalion during the night 17-18 December and at 0345, the enemy again launched an attack against the Battalion positions with the main effort directed at "I" Company. Despite heavy concentration of mortar and artillery fire, the enemy successfully infiltrated the lines and surrounded the Battalion Observation Post located in the "I" Company area. The enemy strength and disposition could not be determined until daylight at which time "I" Company attacked the infiltrating force and, after much close quarter fighting, managed to kill or capture the entire German force which was at platoon strength. (50) (See Map C)

Beginning at 0830, the 3rd Battalion received another artillery, mortar, and rocket barrage that lasted until 0900. It was more intense than that of the 16th. Again the Germans attacked with what later was to be ascertained as elements of the 752 and 753 Panzer Grenadier Regiments supported by 12 tanks and 7 armored cars. (51)

The forces struck against the "I" and "K" Company fronts with the units attacking "K" Company being supported by the tanks and armored cars.

The fighting that developed was the bloodiest the Battalion was ever to endure. On the "K" Company front the German Infantry moved forward of (48,49,50,51) A-4; Personal Knowledge

the tanks and shouting like wild men, they charged the company position. Machine guns, 81 mortars, 105 artillery fire, and 155 Howitzer fire from Corps Artillery soon churned the attacking Germans into a screaming mass. Still they came on and managed to penetrate the "K" Company line a total of approximately 100 yards. The Battalion Commander immediately called for mortar and artillery fires in the penetrated area and that broke the attack. The Germans began to flee in disorder and riflemen of the 3rd Battalion took a heavy toll of the fleeing Germans as they attempted to withdraw from the penetrated area. The Tank Destroyers had the tanks and armored cars under fire but could not destroy them as a small ridge to the front gave the German armor ample protection. However, the tanks and armored cars did not attempt to move up and fire and once the German Infantry broke, they wasted no time in their attempt to withdraw. The 155mm Howitzers brought them under fire during their withdrawal and two tanks were abandoned by the Germans. (52) (See Map C)

While this fighting was taking place, the German forces attacking on the "I" Company front succeeded in making another small penetration but couldn't hold and had to retire. (53)

By 0930, the entire Battalion front had been cleared but only for a short time because at 1000, a force consisting of approximately a Battalion of Infantry attacked in the "I" Company center and managed to drive a penetration 100 yards deep and 400 yards wide. The Battalion Observation Post was surrounded and about 100 German Infantrymen moved into four large houses and began firing from the windows and doorways. Heavy artillery and mortar concentrations were placed on the occupied houses but they were constructed of stone and little effect was obtained. (54) (See Map C)

At this time, the Battalion Commander sealed the entrance of the penetration with artillery fire and ordered the Battalion reserve, which consisted of one rifle platoon, to move into positions and block any further (52,53,54) A-4; Personal Knowledge

penetration. Two 57mm anti-tank guns that were in position near the penetrated zone were ordered to fire armor piercing ammunition into the buildings occupied by the Germans. Within a few minutes the 57mm guns opened fire and began methodically to penetrate practically every foot of the house walls. Riflemen of the Battalion reserve kept pouring continuous fire into the windows to prevent the enemy from firing on the 57mm gun crews. (55) (See Map C)

From the screams within the house one could readily ascertain that the anti-tank guns were creating havoc. Fire was lifted to permit the Germans to surrender. A German speaking rifleman of the 3rd Battalion told them to come out but the request was greeted with gunfire.

The Battalion Commander ordered the Battalion reserve to cease its blocking role and to attack at once. At 1150, the platoon started to infiltrate into the area occupied by the Germans under cover of rifle, machine gun and 57mm AT gunfire. By tossing white phosphorus grenades into the windows, the houses were systematically reduced and soon thereafter the Germans indicated their desire to surrender.

Twenty-five badly shaken Germans was the final toll of prisoners removed. Within the buildings were the gruesome remains of approximately seventy-five Germans, torn to pieces by the fire of the 57 AT guns. (56)

This action spelled finis to the German attempts to take Hofen.

During the period of 19th to 24th of December 1944, constant pressure was maintained on the Battalion front by German raiding patrols. These forays were easily beaten off, usually by mortar and artillery fire. The Battalion Commander expected another full scale attack against the position but luckily none were to develop. The entire Battalion was shaken and very fatigued because rest had been out of the question since the 16th of December. (57)

(55,56,57) A-4; Personal Knowledge

Nevertheless, aided by the supply facilities of the 47th Infantry Regiment, 9th Infantry Division, huge stocks of ammunition and fortification material were dumped on position and all points of weakness were strengthened. If the Germans attempted to strike again they would find the Battalion position stronger than ever. (58)

News of the German break-through to the South of Monschau finally became general knowledge to the 3rd Battalion, 395th Infantry and only then did anyone realize the magnitude of the German attack. (59)

It is reasonable to expect that the heroic defense of Hofen was insignificant when one considers the weight of the German counter-offensive but the officers and men of the 3rd Battalion consider it the acme of their contributions to the winning of World War II.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The Battalion defense was entirely successful but even success must be analysed and criticized to permit a revelation of the sometimes not too apparent facts and to allow a commander to capitalize on lessons learned.

It has been shown that a 6,000 yard front can be successfully defended against heavy attacks, but it must be realized that such a frontage is abnormal to a battalion that only possesses normal fire support. The success of the 3rd Battalion defense can be attributed not only to the normal fire power of a rifle battalion but in addition the full fire power of a field artillery battalion, a tank destroyer company, and four extra 81mm mortars.

The withholding of a reserve, although small, actually snatched victory from defeat. In this particular case a rifle platoon acted as a reserve and was instrumental in destroying a penetrating force. The objective of this small reserve was not to eject the enemy but merely to block the penetration until sufficient fire could be brought to bear.

(58,59) A-4; Personal Knowledge

The relief of the 15th Armored Regiment, 5th Armored Division was well planned and executed but at times the town of Hofen was choked with troops. Being daylight, only sheer luck prevented heavy casualties as German artillery and mortar fire could have played havoc within the overcrowded town. In this particular relief, time was not a factor and the movement of smaller forces with greater time intervals would have insured against excessive casualties.

The Germans tended to commit their forces piecemeal along a rather wide front. This aided the defender immeasurably because the defenses were built on the assumption that such would be the case. It is within the realm of reason that had the Germans struck all out with a massed force against any one company front, the defense would probably have been in dire straits.

The Battalion Commander's order to engage all patrols, even during the hours of darkness, may have tended to reveal a position, but it was proved that a patrol, once engaged, became very confused and it is doubtful that any information gained was of concrete value.

The use of the 60mm mortars was practically nil within the battalion mainly because the mortar crews were skeletonized to provide 81mm mortar crews. In this particular instance good results were obtained because the 81 mortar concentrations were not only more devastating but targets at a much greater range could be engaged. The protective fire offered by the additional 81mm mortars more than compensated the rifle companies for their sacrifice.

Liaison with the units on the flanks using wire facilities was excellent until the initial barrages fired by the Germans severed communication. At that time, no information was forthcoming from either the units on the right or left. Such a situation could have spelled disaster to any or all units concerned and immediate action should have been taken to resume close liaison by any means possible.

Only after participating in such an operation as this did the value of tanks become apparent. True, the Battalion had the service of a TD Company but it must be remembered that this was a towed TD unit and they lacked mobility and shock action. Had this Battalion but one tank, I believe that our losses would have been fewer, especially in the counter-attack phase.

In summation, there is no better way to express the fighting qualities of the 3rd Battalion, 395th Infantry than by quoting the words of a German Officer who, upon capture stated, "I have fought two years on the Russian Front but never have I engaged in such a fierce and bloody battle." (60)

By General Order Number 16, the 3rd Battalion was cited for outstanding performance of duty in action against the enemy during the period 16th to 19th December, 1944 at Hofen, Germany, and under the provisions of section IV, Circular 2, Headquarters, First U.S. Army, dated 4th January 1945 was awarded the Distinguished Unit Badge.

LESSONS LEARNED

Some of the lessons emphasized by this operation are:

1. In the conduct of a defense, adequate protective fires by artillery and mortars are indispensable.
 2. Emphasis should be placed on providing concealment of the defensive position and, in all cases, adequate over-head cover for personnel.
 3. In the defense of a wide front, strong points covering likely approaches proved to be very effective.
 4. Communications are so vital to a defense that constant efforts should be made to improve every type of facility available.
 5. Some reserve, regardless of size, should be provided even if front line positions are undermanned.
 6. Defense positions can always be improved and constant supervision is required on the part of each officer to press that point to the utmost.
- (60) Personal Knowledge

7. Mortars, if observation permits, should always be fired in Battery.

8. Defensive action fatigues men quickly and every effort should be made to provide rest periods for each man and officer.

9. Machine guns can be used singly in a very effective manner and by so doing, more adequate automatic fire coverage of the front is provided.

10. Adequate reconnaissance by all personnel down to and including squad leaders is necessary to conduct a smooth relief operation.

11. No officer should ever permit his subordinate to believe that such a thing as a "quiet sector" exists in warfare.

12. Obstacles and camouflage used on a comprehensive scale by the defender makes the accomplishment of the attackers mission more difficult.

13. The use of patrols should not only be used to gain information but also to keep pressure on the enemy.